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Central Intelligence Agency



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DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

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El Salvador: Implications of the FMLN Peace Strategy [REDACTED]

Summary

After two years of intense negotiations with the government of President Alfredo Cristiani, the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) officially ended hostilities on 1 February and is pledged to disarm and demobilize its forces by the end of October. FMLN leaders view the peace accord as an opportunity to renew the revolutionary struggle in a more democratic environment; they hope to reorganize their cadres and support groups sufficiently to build a credible electoral vehicle to contest the 1994 presidential, legislative, and municipal elections. Notwithstanding FMLN political goals, factional discord, dwindling international aid, and lack of domestic support will make building a unified left-wing party difficult. Moreover, restrictive treaty terms for full disarmament and demobilization and international supervision of the peace process will mitigate FMLN plans to cache weapons and maintain a select group of combat-ready militants. [REDACTED]

The Salvadoran government, meanwhile, will be hard pressed to carry out complex security-related obligations while meeting the political challenges of the guerrillas. Pressure from the extreme right--which [REDACTED]

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is angry with the President for negotiating with the insurgents and agreeing to their participation in a new police force--and possible schisms within the ruling ARENA party as its dying patriarch Roberto D'Aubuisson passes from the scene, will make it especially tough for Cristiani to implement a national strategy for reconstruction and reform during his last two years in office. In this regard, he will rely heavily on international assistance to ensure the success of the peace process. [REDACTED]

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Prelude to Peace

We believe the guerrillas' dialogue strategy evolved by mid-1991 from a "talk/fight" approach to an earnest quest for peace because the political context for continuing the military struggle had shifted dramatically. Apart from the failure of the 1989 "final offensive," which was a fundamental setback to FMLN plans to break the military stalemate and regain the strategic momentum, other factors beyond the control of the guerrillas hastened their decision to end the war. Principal among these factors were:

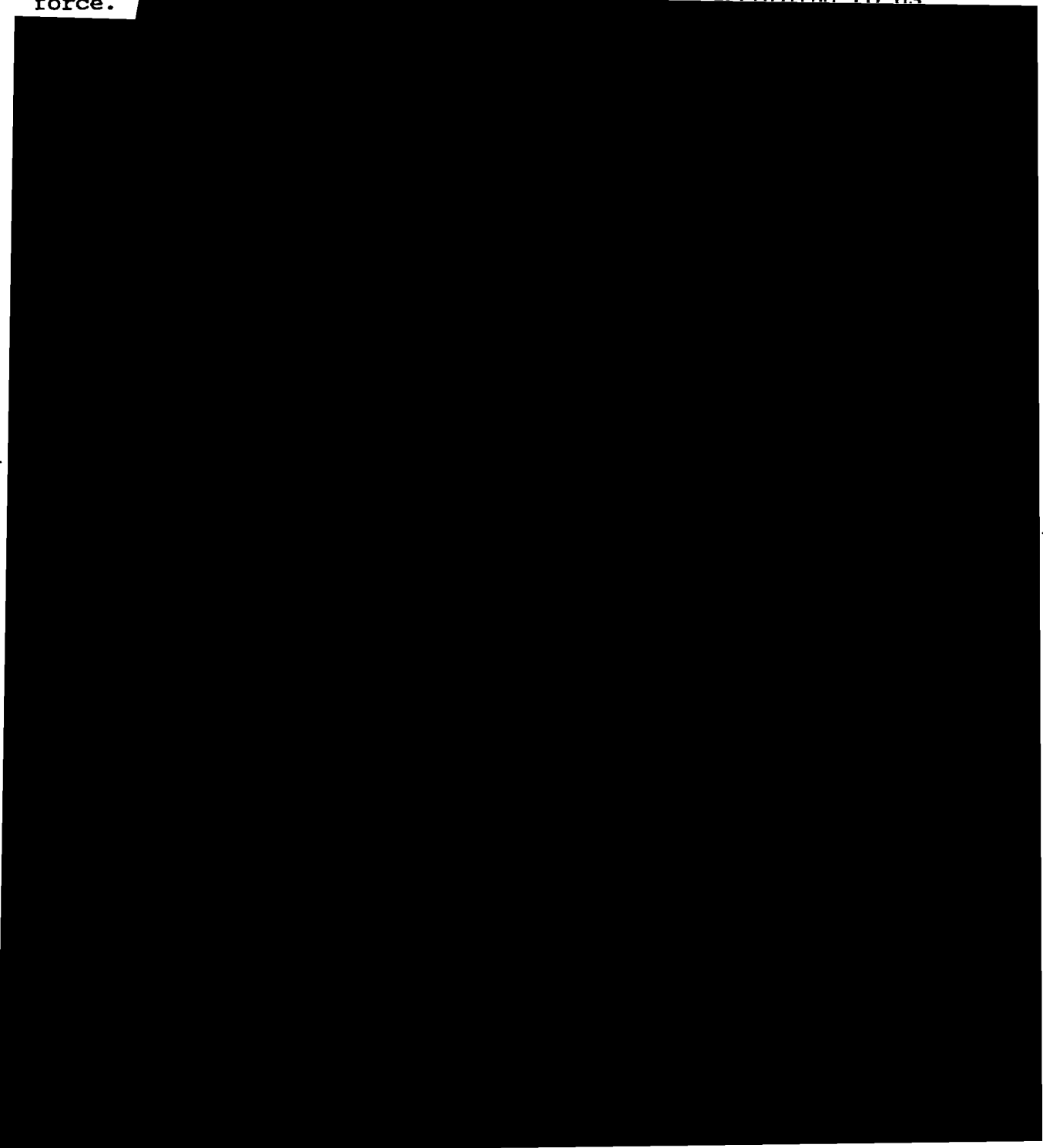
- o The unexpected ouster of the Sandinista regime in Nicaragua via free elections in February 1990 and increasing involvement by the United States, the UN, key Latin American governments, and the European Community in supporting efforts by all five democratically elected governments in Central America to end regional strife.
- o The collapse of the Soviet Bloc and the increasing isolation of Cuba, resulting in a loss to the guerrillas of important material, financial, and political assistance from foreign organizations and governments.
- o The inability of the guerrillas seriously to disrupt any of the seven national elections of the past decade, resulting in both the current mandate of the right-wing ARENA party and the success of Democratic Convergence, a coalition of three leftist parties loosely allied with the FMLN that now controls 11 percent of the seats in the National Assembly and a vice presidential slot. [REDACTED]

Preparing for "Armed Peace"

As hostilities wind down, the guerrillas are attempting to implement what they refer to as an "armed peace" by reserving war

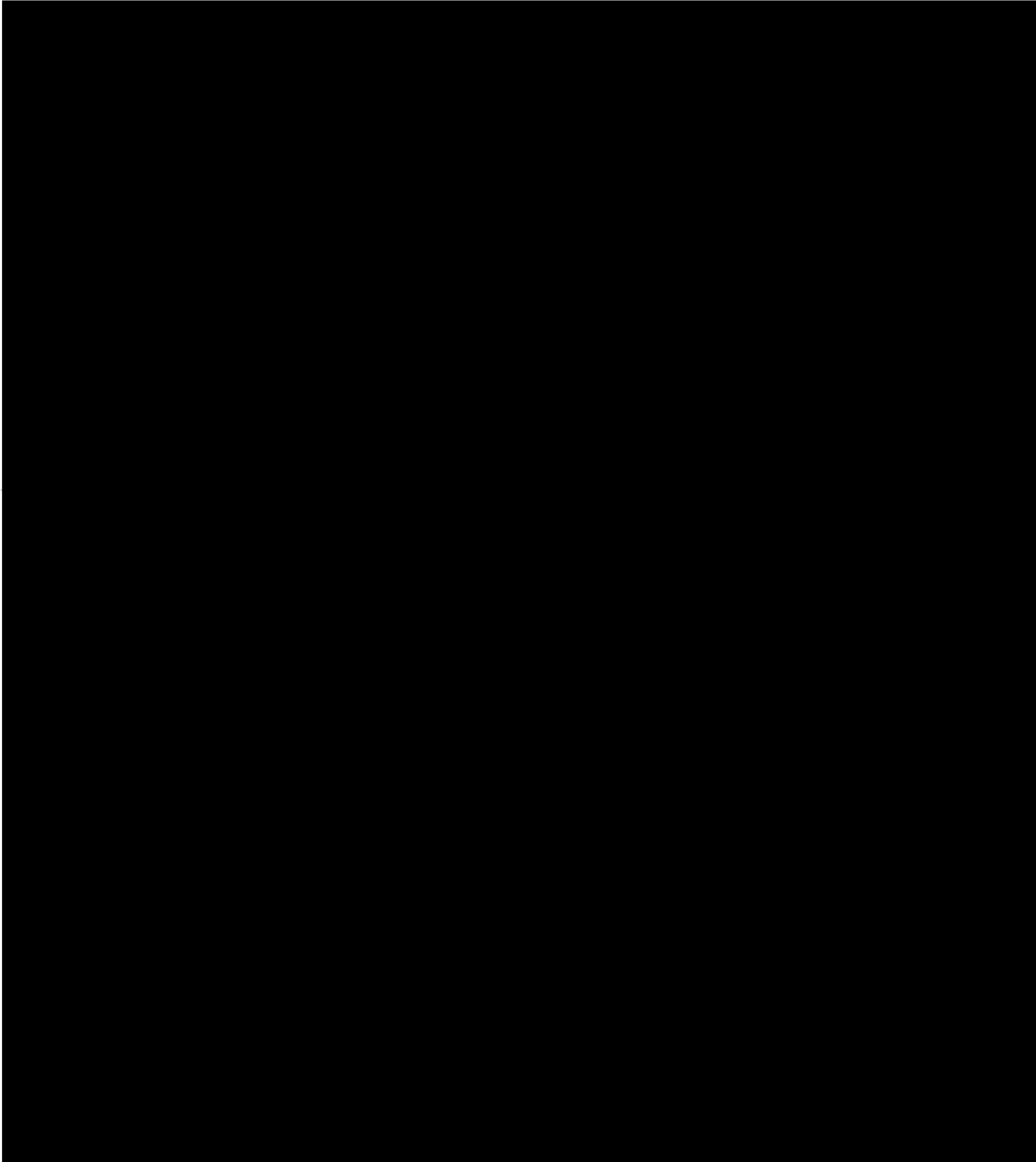
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materiel and maintaining control over portions of their combat force. ~~Service talks according to US~~



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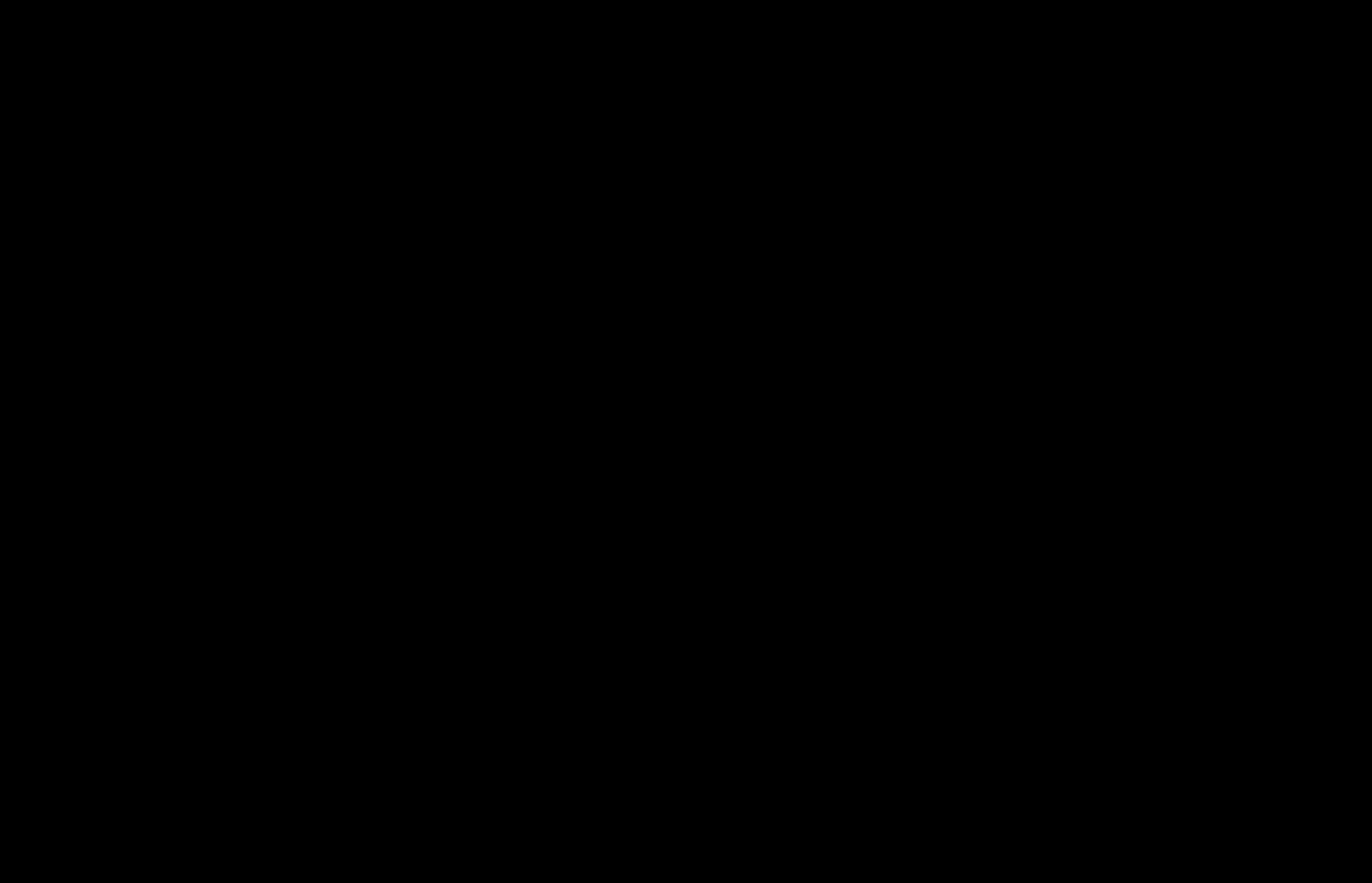
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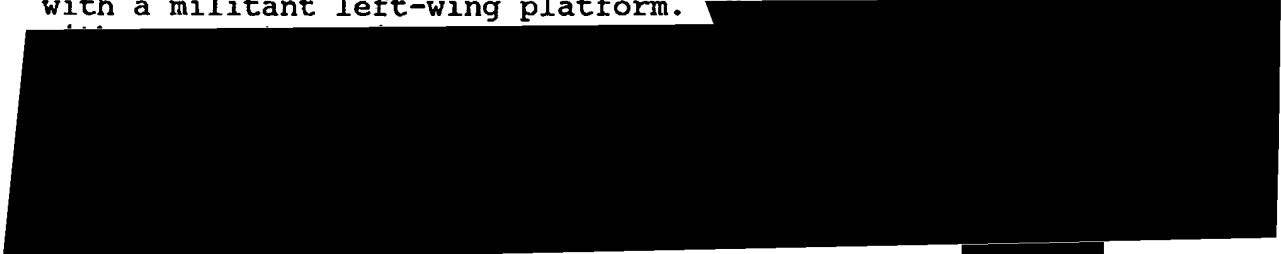
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Potential Obstacles to FMLM Strategy

International supervision of the recent peace agreement--if properly executed--will complicate the FMLN's plan to organize a new mass movement around a shadow army of veteran combatants with access to weapons stockpiles. Many hundreds of UN and other international observers are charged with overseeing the peace process and uncovering violations by either side. The agreement calls for a complete inventory of insurgent arms and personnel and their total destruction and demobilization, respectively, by the end of October. FMLN forces during the ceasefire are obligated to assemble in specific zones, which should limit the movement of insurgents within the country until they are disarmed and demobilized. Moreover, guerrilla storage sites habitually offer poor protection against moisture and corrosion, suggesting that many hidden weapons, munitions, and explosives likely will become degraded during the May to November rainy season. [REDACTED]



Politically, the FMLN's goals may also be out of reach. To the degree that guerrilla senior commanders overestimated for so many years their ability to foment a general insurrection, so too might they be overconfident of their ability to rally the masses with a militant left-wing platform.



Another significant challenge facing the FMLN will be whether, after a decade of survival as a military alliance, its highest profile leaders can maintain political unity among their five disparate factions and assorted front groups. Although insurgent spokesmen insist their movement will continue to function in mainstream politics as a monolithic party, the FMLN may find it difficult to accommodate the long-held ambitions of notorious revolutionaries who espouse diverse ideologies and

personalist agendas. [REDACTED]

Implications for the Government

By guaranteeing the guerrillas their peacetime security and unfettered participation in elections, Cristiani now faces the dilemma of how to protect the constitutional rights of the far left without undermining the interests of his own party or losing control over national events. The President is under fire from elements in the armed forces and ultra-rightist groups for having agreed to a role for "terrorists" in the new police force and for letting much of the oversight for dismantling insurgent forces fall to outside observers. He probably calculates that such pressure will increase if any portion of the FMLN resists full compliance with the disarmament and demobilization timetables, or if renegade elements continue fighting or resort to banditry. Although UN monitors can be expected to help control the level of residual violence as the peace process is implemented, their presence is unlikely to satisfy many of the President's detractors on the right. [REDACTED]

Public reaction to political violence and sabotage, whether initiated by the right or left, probably will press Cristiani to move more decisively against suspects than he might have when war conditions prevailed. At the same time, however, he probably also is mindful that official use of force in maintaining law and order risks being construed by some observers as violations of human rights and civil liberties. [REDACTED]

In our view, Cristiani will depend heavily on foreign governments and groups as a safety net for the peace process and, ultimately, the success of his administration. In this regard, the President probably will work closely with outside observers investigating compliance by the government in the hope that they will reciprocate by fully investigating reported violations on the part of the guerrillas. The administration also might benefit from current moves by Honduras to secure international monitors along its mountainous border with El Salvador, where some FMLN troops and weapons arsenals might be positioned to ride out the demobilization period. San Salvador, however, would look unfavorably on any attempts by Honduras to force repatriation of additional Salvadoran emigres. [REDACTED]

We doubt that disarmed and demobilized insurgents can long maintain exclusive control over their former territorial enclaves

should the government move appropriately to secure its administrative authority over outlying towns and villages, particularly in the eastern portion of the country. Rapid implementation of general amnesty for guerrilla forces--aimed at alleviating fear and distrust of the government--and establishment of a civilian police force in conflictive zones, for example, would help reintegrate once isolated and embattled communities into the political and economic mainstream.

Moreover, programs carried out in former guerrilla zones by domestic and international developmental and humanitarian agencies, combined with local campaigning by rival political parties, likely would open up the FMLN's "strategic rearguard" to new people and ideas, which would include competing social and economic interests, and political pluralism.

Cristiani apparently believes his government and ruling ARENA party can meet the challenges likely to be raised by the far left as it seeks new advantages and leverage in the peacetime environment. While Cristiani supporters may be confident they can check the political ambitions of the FMLN, they probably are concerned that tensions within the ARENA party could rise as patriarchal leader Roberto D'Aubuisson nears death and hardline traditionalists complicate the President's efforts at reconstruction and reform.

Speculative Outlook for the FMLN

Preliminary indications are that FMLN leaders remain divided over the implications of their failed insurgency. According to Embassy and other reporting, some leftists view the past 12 years of civil war as part of a continuing struggle, first launched in January 1932 by Communist martyr Farabundo Marti. They see opportunities for promoting their left-wing agenda in a peacetime environment, unhindered by repressive controls once exercised by military authoritarians and civilian oligarchs. A significant number of surviving cadre in the FMLN--several hundred, in our judgment--are veteran activists who entered guerrilla ranks during the 1970s after having participated in radical student, religious, labor, and peasant groups organized against the Establishment. Trained in revolutionary doctrine and tactics in Cuba, Nicaragua, Vietnam, Libya, and the former Soviet Bloc, at least some of these individuals will attempt to rebuild militant urban and rural front groups reminiscent of a decade ago.

Other FMLN leaders, however--anxious to capitalize on their newly won legitimacy under the terms of the peace accords--are likely to advocate a more pragmatic approach to politics. They probably will shy away from confrontational activities--at least in the near term--in an effort to persuade mainstream opposition parties to work in tandem with leftist efforts to dethrone the ruling ARENA government. Longstanding ideological discord

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between moderates and hardliners in the FMLN, both within and among the various factions, likely will be exacerbated by disputes over tactics and personalist rivalries over control of FMLN resources. Should FMLN unity fail as the electoral contest heats up, leftist prospects for securing renewed international funding, spurring domestic recruitment, and building a viable coalition with other mainstream parties will be greatly diminished. 